

CAMPUS MAIL Students dissatisfied with Ouellette's proposal

By PETER KRAUTLE

Students demonstrating at Fredericton's Centennial Building were to vote yesterday whether to accept an offer to establish a committee to recommend changes in student aid legislation.

Provincial youth minister Jean-Pierre Ouellette made the offer Wednesday following a meeting with cabinet. It was the first breakthrough in negotiations which began Jan. 28 when the more than 500 Université de Moncton first occupied New Brunswick's administrative centre.

The committee as proposed would include one representative

from the campuses on each college and university in New Brunswick to meet on Thursday every two weeks to compose recommendations for changes in student aid legislation.

The government would consider these recommendations at the end of June when the government was better able to examine the state of the province's finances, said Ouellette. Each student would be allowed up to \$1,000 for travel expenses to attend the meetings.

The government was "very concerned" with the indebtedness faced by many students when they left university, he told the Brunswickan in an exclusive

interview but could not afford to meet their requests for a \$3 million student aid budget increase.

He said \$500,000 to \$1 million was a more acceptable range.

The committee would include Ouellette and formal policy-making power would remain with the cabinet. He said, however, the committee could become permanently affiliated with the student aid branch of the youth department if the students wanted this.

An increase in student unemployment this summer would bring compensation by the government in the form of a higher aid budget, he said, if this increase could be demonstrated by the committee.

The program would "remain fairly flexible," he said, and a supplementary estimate could be presented even though the budget is due to be presented at the end of this month.

The New Brunswick government he said, would "definitely work closely with the other Atlantic provinces to form a uniform student aid policy."

Ouellette said he also hopes a committee will be formed with representation from the government, universities and the public to provide continuing input on student aid policy.

The offer represented no change in the government's attitude when

the first student demonstration was held two weeks ago, he said, and the government was still "very firm" in their negotiations.

In order to make changes," he said, "the government needs time."

Ouellette said he thought the student representatives understood the government's position but did not accept their offer. He said he was "pleased" the demonstrators were well-organized and orderly and that they wanted to fight for changes but disagreed with their demands.

"If the students continue to fight for \$3 million," he said, "they'll be there for a long time."

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Government cracking under pressure



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Protesting students at the Centennial building will definitely be continuing their occupation of the provincial building for what seems to be at least another week, according to Gilles Arseneault, one of the Université de Moncton's student negotiators.

"The students here won't accept no for an answer and are determined to stay until their demands are met," said Arseneault, following the issuing of a proposal to protesting students by the minister of Youth, Jean-Pierre Ouellette.

Ouellette addressed the approximately 500 students in the lobby of Centennial building on Wednesday evening, following a meeting with the cabinet and student negotiators earlier in the day.

In his address, Ouellette stated that he asked the Cabinet in their regular Wednesday meeting to increase the amount of money for the student aid program. The cabinet replied that it recognized the problems in the student aid program and hence gave Ouellette a mandate to form a committee comprised of one student from each college and university in New Brunswick to meet with the youth minister every two weeks to help form recommendations to the student aid program.

Ouellette went on to state that these recommendations would be submitted to the cabinet for approval by the end of June of this year. The committee would be granted an initial \$1000 dollar grant for travelling expenses and could become a permanent body in the department of Youth, should the government decide to extend the committee's mandate.

The Youth Minister also pledged support for representatives of the government, students, and universities joining together to aid in the upcoming federal-provincial talks on student aid and education in 1977.

Student reaction to Ouellette's statement at the Centennial building was one of frustration and disappointment. UNB SRC vice-president Gordon Kennedy stood before the crowd and said that

"what Ouellette is giving the student is exactly what they gave us in 1974." The crowd responded with cheers and anti-government slogans.

One of the U de M student negotiators, Camille McLaughlin, commented that "the cabinet admits that changes needed to be made in the student aid program but do not want to act on the changes". McLaughlin predicts that if the present student aid program does not change, student enrollments at university will fall. "At present technical college students are subsidized by Canada Manpower while university students must pay their own way which is an injustice," according to McLaughlin.

Arseneault said that Ouellette's statement indicated that the provincial government may be willing to negotiate with student representatives, however no indication for negotiations were given in meetings with government representatives Wednesday. According to Arseneault, "the government agrees that there is a student aid problem but state they are hesitant to increase student aid until factors such as summer student employment can be analysed." Arseneault feels the government will not be setting a precedent if they increase the amount of money in the student aid program for it is an area where money is needed.

After Ouellette's statement, student negotiators met with protesting students to answer questions and discuss strategy. A referendum was planned was Thursday to decide whether to continue the present occupation, but judging by the general attitude, students don't plan to end their protest until their demands are met.

At present students are crowding the exits of the Centennial building during the daytime to apply pressure to government employees as they enter and leave the building. Students also plan to march through downtown Fredericton on Sunday, although this action is still in the planning stages.

Photo by Steve Patriquin